

LEGISLATIVE POLICY AREA: HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

SUBJECT: State Drinking Water Program

Background/Issue: Washington State, through the Department of Health, has maintained regulatory authority over the Safe Drinking Water Act as delegated by the Environmental Protection Agency. This Act applies to more than 12,000 regulated public water supplies in the State. The Department of Health has been notified that the list of contaminants subject to monitoring will grow from the present 84 to 103 by the year 2002.

In order to maintain this increased level of support for the larger public supplies (the Group A Systems), the Department of Health is proposing legislation that would provide funding from the general fund benchmarked at 15% of the water utility distribution tax. This would generate about \$3.9 million per year. Of that amount, DOH is proposing that approximately \$1.4 million would be given to local health jurisdictions via contracts for the purpose of regulatory support activities over the smaller public water systems – specifically the Group B systems providing 5 or more connections. The legislation proposes to continue properly siting, designing, constructing and testing Group B systems, but limit ongoing water quality monitoring and routine oversight for systems with 5 to 14 connections. This would provide some regulatory relief for the smallest public water systems serving four and fewer connections. The rest of the funding would be utilized to carry out the state's Group A water regulatory program, particularly implementing new Safe Drinking Water Act requirements.

Local health jurisdiction involvement in the Group B water systems is voluntary and has been carried out through Joint Plans of Operation between DOH and the individual local health jurisdiction. This proposed legislation would, for the first time, provide some funding to local health jurisdictions choosing to provide Group B oversight within their jurisdiction.

The proposed legislation is based upon the recommendations of the Water Supply Advisory Committee. The Water Supply Advisory Committee includes representatives from the water utilities, small public water systems, municipal water utilities, local public health and other stakeholders. WSAC staff have also periodically attended the Water Supply Advisory Committee meetings.

The Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials (WSALPHO) considers safe drinking water a top public health responsibility and priority. Since involvement in Group B Water System oversight is local option, WSALPHO supports the agency request legislation in concept and would propose to continue working with the Department of Health on the details of the legislation and its implementation – including the funding proposal. WSALPHO is seeking WSAC support for the proposed legislation

in concept and to continue working with DOH around the specifics of carrying out the proposal.

Recommendation: WSAC support WSALPHO's request to support the legislation in concept and to continue to work with DOH on the specifics of carrying out the proposed legislation including the funding proposal.